

[Joke on Jake]

Tales - Tall Tale

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Wayne Walden

ADDRESS 51 Bank Street, NYC

DATE December 8, 1938

SUBJECT THE JOKE ON JAKE

1. Date and time of interview Afternoons of December 5 and 7, 1938
2. Place of interview Home of Informant
3. Name and address of informant Mrs. Annette Hamilton, 145 Waverly Pl., NYC
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. None
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Informant lives in small three-or four-room apartment on the ground floor. She in a dressmaker and does most of the work at home. I judge my informant to be nearing 55 or 60 years of age. She is a loquacious lady

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when "wound up," and may serve me further as a source for tales of various kinds. An American, of American parentage, she was born in Texas and lived for a considerable time in western States, coming here to New York about 20 years ago.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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SUBJECT THE JOKE ON JAKE

"Gosh knows I don't live in a swanky apartment. Neither the house nor the neighborhood I live in would seem attractive enough for a tramp to try his luck in. He might possibly get a lump, but to expect a sitdown, or to throw his feet under the table in such a dump as I must call my home, would mean that the man was either balmy or so desperately hard-up as to take a chance on anything.

"But occasionally a guy on his uppers does take a crack at the neighborhood, and as my dingy apartment to on the ground floor, I probably am visited by them more often than dwellers who inhabit the caves higher up in the house.

"Sometimes, too darned often in fact, the pesky peddlers come buzzing around. And generally when I answer the door it is to be met by one of them trying to sell me a can of scouring powder or a bottle of hair tonic, or something I don't need. Sometimes, the line

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of chatter they hand out — you can't help pitying some of them, I buy a can of roach dust or some such article. But they, on the 2 whole, are bigger nuisances than the down-and-outs, and harder to get rid of. In truth I'd much rather put up with the bums. Some of them weren't always on the bum, and now and then you meet one who is interesting to talk to.

“I guess it was about two months ago a knock caused me to answer the door, and when I looked out I see a tall, lean and rather ragged old fellow. I knew right away he wasn't a salesman. For one thing he didn't spring at me with his sales baloney, nor try to get his foot in the door. He just took off his hat and seemed kind of uncertain how to begin his spiel. Most of 'em have some sort of spiel. He didn't look so very old — about seventy maybe — and he seemed fairly clean, at least not lousy. And the more I looked at him the more he struck me as someone not of these parts, and possibly not a bum at all.

“Well, since he didn't seem to know how to speak up for himself, I finally says, 'What is it you want?' and, thinking maybe the man is hungry and a bit embarrassed about asking, I finally says, 'Are you hungry?' He was, of course, but I guess he hadn't planned on negotiating a feed quite so easy as all that. So I says, 'Come on in' and so he comes in and I sets him up to the table. I put out some grub before him and made him a pot of coffee — if there was one thing he fell for, it was coffee.

“So, as he was eating, he starts to warm up a bit, and starts to tell me something of his travels. He'd been everywhere I guess, from Maine to California and back again it seemed. After awhile he mentions 3 Colorado. 'I've been in that state myself,' I says. 'I know that old state like a book myself,' I says. I guess that remark jerked the old man out of himself more than anything else I'd said before. He looked at me then with real interest. 'Do you really?' he says. 'Do you know the Lone Cone country? I used to punch cattle all around that part,' he says. 'I've rode the range from hell to breakfast all over that district.' From his talk and looks, I guess he wasn't kiddin' either. He looked like that was what he'd been.

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"I did some prospecting up in the hills of Boulder County and I used to work around the northern part of the state quite a bit. Do you know where Eton is?' he asked me. I didn't remember that town, but when he told me it was near Greeley, not so far south of the Wyoming line, I had an idea. 'I had some mighty fine times up in that part of the state,' he said, 'but I guess now it's not the same as it used to be, with the automobile and everything. The open range is about gone,' he says, 'a lot of it become fenced in and made farms of. It can't be the cow country that it used to be.

"I wasn't around there during the dry spell, when Prohibition hit the country, but I bet it was hell then. It sure must of been dreary. As I recollect the old place, and the fellows I used to know, I don't see how they put it over,' he says. 'Well, thank you, ma'am, for the meal,' he says, 'I appreciate it very kindly,' he says, 'and I sure was glad to find someone from the old country,' he says as he gets up to go.

"That's all right,' if you happen around again, drop in,' I says. 'I haven't much, but a little something to eat won't break 4 me nor make me, so don't go hungry,' I tells him. He would have done the dishes, if I'd wanted him, but I didn't care to have him messing around with 'em, probably making the joint worse looking than it was. So he beats it.

"Well, that visit was, as I said, a couple of momths ago, and I'd about forgotten all about it. But, lo and behold! my Mister Man shows up again. I'm going back,' he says, 'I'm going back to the old stamping grounds. And being in the neighborhood, I thought I'd call on you again,' he says, 'and see if you had any message you wanted me to take along to anyone out there,' he says.

"I just can't think of anybody I might know that you might know,' I says, 'If I did know anybody you might have known, it would probably be since your day,' I told him, 'but thanks, just the same.'

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"But, as he was eating, he gets to telling me about certain people and asking if I knew any of them. It seemed that I didn't, though.

"I bet you know old Jake Snyder, or heard of him anyway. Everybody knew old Jake.' I had to admit that old Jake was not on my calling list, and shameful as it was, I'd never heard tell of him. For a moment I imagined the old man doubted that I'd ever been west of Hoboken, that maybe I was stringing him about being once in Colorado. Anyhow, pretty soon he goes on, evidently giving me the benefit of the doubt.

"Old Jake,' he says, 'was a saloon keeper, and a man that weighed well over three hundred pounds — three twenty seven so he told 5 everybody, and he looked it. And so far as anyone knew he had always been a bachelor. It's too bad you didn't know Jake; it would be easier to describe him if you'd a known him.'

"The old man poured himself another cup of coffee and rolled a cigarette. 'Poor old Jake,' the old man sort of chuckled, 'about as mean and low-down a trick as the boys could play on him happened one night when the Duke came to town. And gosh, how Jake liked to eat! One reason he bached I guess, was 'cause he didn't have a woman. They wasn't many women out there anyway, and what there was didn't seem to hanker much for Jake. He was too heavy to be in the running, I s'pose. But he wasn't all fat. He was stout as a bull, and in a rough and tumble fight it would take a darned good man to go up against him.'

"But what was the joke they played on him when the Duke came to town?" I asked.

"I was comin' to that,' says the old man, 'but I'm glad you reminded me, or I might of strayed off the trail. I was thinking of another time, but I'll tell you that later.

"You see Jake did his batchen in the rear part of the house. The saloon, naturally, was in the front part. So when he wasn't too busy at the bar, he'd be in the back a cookin'. He was great for dumplings, and bragged that he could make as good dumplings as any woman in

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the country. Well, it happened that several times when Jake cooked a stew with dumplings in it, he'd invite one or two of the boys back to eat with him, and see for themselves how good them dumplings were.

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"But the trouble with Jake was, that when he'd go to test the dumplings, to see if they was done, his test wouldn't be just a taste, but a whole darned dumpling. And he'd do this testing so often, that by the time the dumplings ought to of been done, they'd all be et up.

"It wasn't that he was greedy or selfish. He'd just kinda forget about his having company for dinner. He was always sorry of course, and would try to fill them up with something else. So whether the dumplings was as good as Jake said they was, no one ever knew.

"Jake was so good-natured that even when the boys got stung on his dumplings they didn't hardly get mad at him. But while they wasn't mad, some of the boys thought the joke had gone far enough, and it was time to play a joke on Jake.

"So they lays their heads together and figures out a plan. There was a fellow around town good on doing ventriloquism - talkin' down his throat. He might not a been quite what this Charley McCarthy is, but he was so good at it that he had a lot of 'em fooled, includin' me the first time I heard him. So they gets him as the first move.

"Then they borrow a clothes store dummy from Greeley. The next thing was to get the dummy trimmed right. After some argument they decides to fix him up like a real dude; as right fresh from England, a member of the House of Lords. Where the Sam Hill they ever got all the duds and trappings they finally dolled him out in, I never heard.

"The next thing they does, is to lug this dummy into ol' Jake's place and to interduce him aa a Duke with plenty of money, and 7 out for a good time. They explains that His Highness was purty drunk as he was, but the rest of 'em wasn't, and that the Duke wanted his guests to have service and lots of it. What's more the Duke is sensitive to a slight, but

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there is one thing he has, besides a bun on, and that was a big wad of good United States money.

“Glad to meet you,” says Jake, to the Duke, not noticing that the hand he shook belonged to one of the bunch standing 'round the Duke.

“What'll you have to drink, Mister Duke,” he says. 'Set 'em up to the boys,' the ventriloquist makes the Duke answer.

“So old Jake puts out the drinks to the whole caboodle except the Duke. As he went to serve him, one of the fellows winks and tells Jake to let the Duke sober up a bit. So they lays the Duke out on a table where he could sleep it off, and the rest of the bunch begins to enjoy themselves.

“But every so often the Duke would rouse from his drunken slumber enough to holler out, 'set 'em up to the boys.' And it went on that way, round after round, way into the night.

“Course, ol' Jake was happy as a lark, thinkin' of his profits rolling in. It wasn't within Jake's memory that so rich and wonderful a customer had ever patronized his saloon. Of course His Grace had spent most of the time sloopin' on the table. But his frequent orders kept Jake jumping and sweatin' a servin' the rest of the crowd.

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“No wonder ol' Jake was pleased. No other bar was as busy as his that night, and by cheese and crackers, no other saloon had a real live Duke as its customer. 'Dose boys who brung him in,' I guess ol' Jake was thinkin', 'I will gif dem a goot meal of dumblings.'

“Finally, Jake began to notice that the crowd had thinned out somewhat. Some of them still stuck around singin' songs, and the Duke still lay on the table. After awhile the gang grew scarcer yet, and purty soon they'd all cleared out, 'cepting Jake and the Duke.

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"Golly,' thinks Jake, 'that darned Duke didn't do any drinking, and he ought to be comin' out of it by now.'

"So Jake does some tidying up of the place; kicks the spittoons back where they belonged; picks up after the crowd; and to kill a little more time, he swabs the bar. All the while he keeps lookin' at the clock and hoping the Duke will wake up. It was long past closing time, and Jake too was getting all in and sleepy.

"Well, to make a long story short; Jake at last goes over to the Duke and speaks to him. 'Mister Duke,' he says, 'Mister Duke, vill you please vake op.'

"No answer, of course, from the Duke. 'Hey Mister Duke, I vish to glose up now, and vill you please bay your bill.' Still the Duke slept on, and Jake was beginning to lose his good nature.

"Mister Duke,' Jake shouts, py golly, I vant you to bay up your bill. I vant to glose up, d'ye hear?' But the Duke remains dead to the world.

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"Maybe,' thinks Jake, 'that damned Duke in trying to get out of paying him. That was something he hadn't thought of, and, horrified by the awful suspicion, he makes another try at getting the Duke to sit up and take notice. He shakes the Duke, and then he tumbles him off the table and lets him fall on the floor. By now with his Dutch temper up, he was just on the point of cuffing the Duke into sobriety, and collecting his account when some of the gang rushed in. They'd been watching all the time through a window. Seeing the Duke stretched out on the floor, and seeming to be plumb dead, they says: 'My God, Jake whatcha done! Oh! Jake it looks as if you've killed the Duke. Bet you that's just what you done!'

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"Old Jake had been purty mad a moment before, but now he gets purty darned scared. He tries to do some swift thinkin'.

"'Boys,' he said, 'py Golly I had to do it. I didn't vant to hit him, but that son-of-a-gun of a Duke drew a knife on me.'

"Then, of course the bunch begin to laugh and, picking the Duke up, they exposes him to Jake for the wooden dummy he was.

"'Boys,' said Jake, forgetting entirely the Duke's bill, and tickled to death that he wasn't goin' to be hung for murder, 'boys gome cop and haf a drink. Py Golly dat vas a goot joke on me!'"

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NOTE:

(Were I a better typist this story would have been rewritten, with a little alteration and better paragraphing. My own criticism of this would likely be that it moves too circumlocutorily and languidly to the essential part of the narration, and is also afflicted with verbosity. But as told to me the story was unhurried and even wordier. I have taken care, however, to err in retaining all odd words and expressions rather than in omitting them.)